

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 AID-05 IGA-02 MC-02 ACDA-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00
/072 W

-----091246Z 093528 /53

R 090945Z MAY 77
FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1895
INFO AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
AMEMBASSY MANILA
AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
CINCPAC HONOLULU

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 9943

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

EO 11652: GDS
TAGS: MASS, TH, ID
SUBJ: POTENTIALLY DAMAGING IMPACT ON REGIONAL STABILITY OF CON-
GRESSIONAL REJECTION OF FY1978 MAP FOR THAILAND

REF: STATE 103006 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: BANGKOK PRESS HAS PROMINENTLY REPORTED ACTION BY CHURCH
SUB-COMMITTEE IN SENATE MAY 4, DECLINING TO APPROPRIATE MAP FOR
THAILAND AND INDONESIA ON BASIS THAT DEPARTMENT'S PRESENTATION WAS
QTE NOT CONVINCING END QTE. WE ARE PLEASED TO LEARN FROM REFTEL THAT
PRESS REPORTS ON THIS MATTER ARE MISLEADING AND THAT FULL HOUSE OF
REPRESENTATIVES AND SENATE MAY TAKE MORE POSITIVE ATTITUDE. THAI
MEDIA, NOTING EXPOSED POSITION OF THAILAND FACING POTENTIALLY
HOSTILE COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS, COMMENTS THAT IF THAILAND DOES NOT
HAVE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES JUSTIFYING MAP, QTE THEN WHO THE
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HELL HAS? END QTE. THAILAND'S ASEAN PARTNERS SEE FATE OF THAILAND
AS CLOSELY LINKED TO THEIR OWN AND HAVE EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT U.S.
APPEARS TO BE TURNING AWAY FROM ASIA. THAI LEADERS REGARD SENATE
SUB-COMMITTEE ACTION AS A SYMBOL WHICH WILL CREATE BAD IMPRESSION
IN THAILAND AND SOUTHEAST ASIA. END SUMMARY.

2. BANGKOK PRESS REPORTED PROMINENTLY MAY 5 ACTION BY SENATE FOREIGN

AID SUB-COMMITTEE (UNDER SENATOR CHURCH) ON MAY 4 DECLINING TO APPROVE APPROPRIATIONS FOR MILITARY ASSISTANCE FOR THAILAND AND INDONESIA, WHILE VOTING THEM FOR GREECE, PORTUGAL, SPAIN, TURKEY, THE PHILIPPINES, AND JORDAN. ARGUMENT ATTRIBUTED TO SENATOR CHURCH IN MEDIA IS THAT DEPT OF STATE HAD PRESENTED ARGUMENTS IN SUPPORT OF MAP FOR THAILAND AND INDONESIA WHICH WERE QTE NOT CONVINCING END QTE. WE ARE RELIEVED TO NOTE FROM REFTEL THAT PRESS REPORTS ARE ERRONEOUS.

3. THE TREATMENT ACCORDED THE ERRONEOUS PRESS REPORTS IN THAI MEDIA MAKES CLEAR WHAT A BLOW REFUSAL BY CONGRESS TO APPROVE THAI MAP FOR FY1978 WOULD BE. THAILAND, AS VIRTUALLY THE ONLY SOUTH-EAST ASIAN COUNTRY IN DIRECT CONTACT WITH THE COMMUNIST STATES OF INDO-CHINA, SEES ITSELF AS UNDER DIRECT THREAT FROM ITS NEIGHBORS. ITS ARMED FORCES AND POLICE ARE PERIODICALLY ENGAGED IN DIRECT COMBAT WITH LAO AND CAMBODIAN FORCES, AND THE THAI ARE WELL AWARE OF THE GROWING VIETNAMESE MILITARY ROLE IN LAOS. MOREOVER, THE BARRAGE OF HOSTILE VIETNAMESE AND LAO RADIO AND MEDIA COMMENT ON THAILAND LEAVES LITTLE ROOM FOR THAI HOPES FOR EARLY ACCOMMODATION WITH ITS COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS. THAI EFFORTS TO IMPROVE RELATIONS WITH LAOS HAVE MET WITH ONLY SLIGHT SUCCESS TO DATE, AND NORMALIZATION WITH CAMBODIA AND VIET-NAM, DESPITE A SOFT AND SUPPLE THAI EFFORT TO ENCOURAGE SUCH A RAPPROACHMENT, HAS MADE LITTLE OR NO PROGRESS.

4. IN SHORT, THE THAI SEE THEMSELVES AS MUCH MORE DIRECTLY THREATENED BY COMMUNIST NEIGHBORS THAN GREECE, PORTUGAL, SPAIN, TURKEY, THE PHILIPPINES, OR JORDAN. THIS POINT WAS MADE WITH PARTICULAR FORCE IN EDITORIAL IN BANGKOK POST (WHICH OFTEN REFLECTS VIEWS OF CONFIDENTIAL

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RTG) MAY 6, ENTITLED, QTE STRANGE PRIORITY IN U.S. SENATE. END QTE EDITORIAL NOTED SENATOR CHURCH'S REMARK THAT THAILAND (AND INDONESIA) DID NOT HAVE THE KIND OF QTE EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES END QTE WHICH WOULD JUSTIFY MILITARY GRANTS. EDITORIAL CONTINUES, QTE IF THAILAND DOES NOT HAVE 'EXCEPTIONAL CIRCUMSTANCES', THEN WHO THE HELL HAS? END QTE. EDITORIAL CONTINUES THAT COUNTRIES APPROVED BY SENATE SUB-COMMITTEE FOR MILITARY GRANT AID ALL HAVE U.S. MILITARY BASES, WITH EXCEPTION OF JORDAN.

5. THAILAND'S PARTNERS IN ASEAN TEND TO SEE THAILAND AS LIVING UNDER THREAT AND THE U.S. AS TURNING AWAY FROM ASIA, AN IMPRESSION WHICH WILL BE STRENGTHENED IF THE SENATE SUB-COMMITTEE ACTION STANDS. I NOTE THAT IN AMBASSADOR UNDERHILL'S FAREWELL CALL ON MALAYSIAN PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN ON MAY 4, HUSSEIN EXPRESSED CONCERN THAT THE U.S. WAS TO SOME DEGREE TURNING AWAY FROM ASIA. ALTHOUGH HUSSEIN STRESSED TO UNDERHILL THAT THE WAY IN WHICH THE THAI DEAL WITH DOMESTIC ISSUES SUCH AS CORRUPTION MAY BE MORE SIGNIFICANT THAN ANYTHING THE THAI INSURGENTS OR THEIR INDOCHINESE BACKERS MIGHT DO, HIS APPRECIATION OF THE SIGNIFICANCE THAT THAI

SECURITY HAS FOR MALAYSIA IS UNDERLINED BY HIS STATEMENT IN BANGKOK IN MARCH THAT MALAYSIA WOULD CONTRIBUTE TO THE DEFENSE OF THAILAND, SHOULD THE NEED ARISE. SINGAPORE PRIME MINISTER LEE KUAN YEW AND PRESIDENT SUHARTO ARE FREQUENTLY REPORTED AS EXPRESSING CONCERN OVER THAILAND'S SECURITY PROBLEMS.

6. IT SEEMS TO ME THAT THE SIZE OF THE MODEST ADMINISTRATION REQUESTS FOR THAI MAP IN FY1978 (DOLS 8.0 MILLION IN GRANT AID, DOLS 1.0 MILLION IN TRAINING, AND DOLS 29.5 MILLION IN FMS CREDITS) IS LESS SIGNIFICANT THAN THE REGIONAL IMPORTANCE OF THE PROGRAM AS A SYMBOL OF U.S. SUPPORT FOR AN INDEPENDENT, NON-COMMUNIST SOUTHEAST ASIA AS WELL AS AN INDICATOR OF CONTINUING U.S. INTEREST IN A RELATIVELY EMBATTLED FRIEND AND ALLY.

7. THIS POINT CAME OUT VERY CLEARLY IN A CONVERSATION THE CHIEF OF JUSMAG, COL. WALKER, HAD WITH THAI MINISTER OF DEFENSE ADMIRAL SANGAT CHALOYU ON MAY 6. SA-NGAT, THOUGH CORDIAL AS USUAL, SAID HE CONFIDENTIAL

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WAS VERY MUCH CONCERNED ABOUT THE SENATE SUB-COMMITTEE ACTION IN DISALLOWING THE MAP ASSISTANCE FOR THAILAND. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT DOLS 8.0 MILLION WOULD NOT BUY ALL THAT MUCH, BUT HE EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE VERY BAD IMPRESSION THIS ACTION CREATED IN THAILAND AND IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. HE POINTED OUT THAT MALAYSIA AND SINGAPORE COULD NOT SURVIVE UNLESS THAILAND STOOD FIRM.

8. DESPITE SOME UNFAVORABLE ASPECTS IN THE CURRENT SITUATION IN THAILAND, THE THAI HAVE A LOT GOING FOR THEM. THE ECONOMY IS IN GOOD CONDITION, AND THE TRADE AND BALANCE OF PAYMENTS PICTURE IS GOOD. THE COMMUNIST-LED INSURGENCY IS NOT YET A SERIOUS BURDEN ON THE OVERALL LIFE OF THE COUNTRY, AND THE GENUINE THAI ATTACHMENT TO THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF MONARCHY, NATION, AND BUDDHISM IS UNIMPAIRED.

9. HOWEVER, THE CONFIDENCE OF THE THAI IN THEIR ABILITY TO MEET THE CHALLENGES FACING THEM (AND PARTICULARLY THE TWIN PROBLEMS OF THE INSURGENCY AND THE POTENTIAL THREAT OF AGGRESSION FROM THE INDOCHINESE COUNTRIES) IS BRITTLE. WE ENCOUNTER EVERYWHERE EXPRESSIONS OF DOUBT BY PROMINENT THAI, IN ALL WALKS OF LIFE, THAT THEY WILL BE ABLE TO MEET THESE CHALLENGES SUCCESSFULLY. A PROMINENT THAI BUSINESSMAN WHO BUYS A CONDOMINIUM IN HAWAII, A SENIOR THAI POLICE COLONEL WHO CONCLUDES A GENERALLY UPBEAT (AND REASONABLY OBJECTIVE) ASSESSMENT OF THE INSURGENCY IN NORTHEASTERN THAILAND WITH THE PATHETIC QUERY TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER, QTE DO YOU FRANKLY THINK THAT WE CAN MAKE IT AGAINST THE COMMUNISTS? END QTE--THESE ARE EXAMPLES OF THE BRITTLINESS OF THAI CONFIDENCE. CONGRESSIONAL ACTION TO WITHHOLD SOME OF THE MODEST FUNDS REQUESTED FOR MAP IN FY1978 WOULD FURTHER DAMAGE THE ALREADY BRITTLE THAI SELF-CONFIDENCE WHICH WILL BE ESSENTIAL IF THAILAND IS TO SURVIVE THE CHALLENGES FACING IT.

10. I KNOW THAT SENIOR OFFICERS IN THE DEPARTMENT APPRECIATE MANY
OF THESE ASPECTS OF THE THAI SITUATION, AND I AM SURE THEY WERE
REFLECTED IN MEETINGS WITH GENERAL KRIANGSAK IN WASHINGTON RECENT-
LY. I HOPE THAT THIS QUESTION OF CONFIDENCE AND ITS BEARING ON
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THE WHOLE REGION OF SOUTHEAST ASIA WILL BE KEPT IN MIND IN THE
DEPARTMENT'S CONTACTS WITH CONGRESS.
WHITEHOUSE

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